

NINETY-NINTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY of the STATE OF MISSOURI FIRST REGULAR SESSION

FIRST DAY, WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 4, 2017

ADDRESS BY SPEAKER TODD RICHARDSON

Good afternoon. Welcome back.

Thank you, Judge Pritchett, for coming all the way from Poplar Bluff to administer the oath of office, and thank you to the Lady from St. Charles for the nomination. I would also like to thank you all for trusting me again with the privilege of serving as your Speaker. It is truly one of the greatest honors of my life. My family is here with me today with the exception of my daughter Briley, who is back home with grandma. Many of you know my parents, Mark and Kathy Richardson, my son Sawyer, and the only reason I can do this, my beautiful wife Amber Richardson.

To all of the guests we have with us today, I want to welcome you to the Missouri House. I want to specifically welcome and thank the legislative spouses with us today. Your sacrifice allows all of us to do what we do, and I want to thank you for it.

The opening day of a new General Assembly is always exciting because it brings new faces and new energy to this body. To our new members, I want you to take a look around. For over a hundred years an unbroken line of men and women just like yourselves have come to this chamber to make our state a better place. You are about to embark on an incredible journey of service. There will never be a time when you're more optimistic or excited about your service here than you are today. Remember the feeling you have today throughout your service here.

For those of you that were just elected to your final term in the House, I want to thank you for your service, your confidence in me and your friendship. We came in together, and it is an honor to have served this state with you for the last six years. While this may be the beginning of the end for us in this chamber, let's make sure we make the most out of this opportunity to leave Missouri better than we found it.

This address is different than the ones you've heard the past eight years. For the first time in Missouri's history, our great state is governed by a super-majority of Republicans and a Republican in the governor's mansion. Now, I knew that would be a popular line with the majority party. But with this greater power comes even greater responsibility – a responsibility to make the legislative process deliberative. That means we must respect the voices and viewpoints of every Missourian, as represented by each and every one of you. During this session we are going to deal with big issues, issues that have the power to transform our state. Inevitably, we are going to disagree, both in our caucuses and across the aisle. This is the people's House and we are a body that is supposed to have spirited discussion, but those discussions and that disagreement should stay professional and mindful of our fellow legislators and the constituents we serve.

Today, I want to focus on where we are as a State, and even more importantly, the kind of state we can become. One area I know we can find common ground is in our love of the great state of Missouri. Missouri is home to an amazing, diverse people. We are blessed with incredible natural resources; industry-leading businesses, both big and small; and the most productive farmers and ranchers you will find anywhere in the world. We are a state of culture, literature, championship sports teams, and world

class family entertainment.

Despite these and countless other great things about our state, we begin this legislative session at time when the pace of change is threatening to leave Missouri behind. Our population isn't growing as fast as the rest of the country. Wages, when adjusted for inflation, have been stagnant, and explosive growth in our welfare spending is indicative of rising poverty and decreased economic opportunity.

As some of you know, I turned 40 just a couple of weeks ago. Over the hill jokes aside, the world today is very different than it was in 1976. In 1976, if you needed a hotel room you would drive until you found a vacancy sign. You wouldn't have dreamed of pulling a computer out of your pocket and making a reservation. In 1976, a main street retailer didn't have to worry about global competition. There was of course no Twitter or Facebook. If you wanted to communicate with someone you actually had to see them in person, or at the least pick up a landline telephone.

This change isn't something we should lament or be afraid of, but it is something we must acknowledge. Today's world and, more importantly, today's economy are radically different than they were just a few decades ago. Just a few decades ago you could find shoe manufacturers in small towns across Missouri. Just a few decades ago, you could support a family on a couple hundred-acre farm. Just a few decades ago, you could expect to work for one company your entire life and retire with a gold watch and a nice pension. Today's economy is more mobile. States now must compete for jobs and workforce on a global level.

This change isn't slowing. In fact, it's accelerating. Everywhere you look, a changing economy puts some of our old ways of doing things in doubt. The states that have held on to the policies of a now bygone era have presided over an economic decline that's increasing poverty and devastating the middle class. Alternatively, states that are embracing change are growing with vibrant and dynamic economies.

I've sat in this chamber and listened often to governors and others speak about programs and insist that "the legislature, the government, is creating jobs." Let's get it straight. Government does not create jobs. Real people do. Government's role is to lay a stable foundation upon which entrepreneurs and hard-working Missourians can do the job-creating.

Competing with other states and other countries for the jobs of today requires a workforce, an education system, a legal framework, and labor policies that are capable of providing a strong, stable, and steady foundation for a growing economy.

First, let's talk about what should be easy – removing the unnecessary government regulations that stifle innovation and job creation. I say should be easy, because the beneficiaries of the status quo will fight any change, no matter how small, no matter how common in other states, and no matter how many jobs it will create.

I have tasked two house committees, Government Efficiency and Professional Registration & Licensing, with examining the state's regulation and licensure requirements and crafting legislation to relieve the regulatory burden on businesses in our state.

Two prime examples: ride-sharing and lodging. Uber, Lyft and others are changing the way people travel. Companies like HomeAway and AirBnB are revolutionizing the lodging industry, nearly everywhere but here. Here they are met with regulators trying to keep them from operating. It is past time that Missouri had statewide frameworks for disruptive technologies and allowed private enterprise to function in a free market.

Reforming our state's regulatory environment alone will not be enough. We must also create the kind of environment that makes Missouri an attractive place to do business. States that are embracing 21st century labor and tort reforms are growing faster than states that do not.

Missouri is now in the minority nationally and one of the last states in the region that doesn't allow workers to choose for themselves whether they want to join a labor union. If employees want to join they should be able to join, but no one should be forced to join an organization against their will.

According the Bureau of Labor Statistics, since becoming a right-to-work state in 2012, Michigan has added 58,000 manufacturing jobs, while over the last two years Missouri has lost about 1,200 manufacturing jobs. And what's more, Michigan's average weekly wage isn't declining; it is growing at almost twice the rate of Missouri's.

Tomorrow, on the first day allowed, I will refer right-to-work to committee and I would ask the chairwoman of the economic development committee to get that legislation to the floor as soon as possible. To build a more stable foundation, to grow jobs, to increase wages, we will put right-to-work legislation on the governor's desk and he will sign it.

The voters have spoken, our majorities campaigned on it, and the governor's race was fought over it, Missouri should and will soon be a right-to-work state.

We must also ensure our court system is fair to all litigants. Unfortunately, St. Louis was just rated the worst judicial jurisdiction in the country. This is not a place where we want to be ranked number one. Let's not just pick on St. Louis. Our state's policies have helped make it a national magnet for massive litigation. Early in session it is my intention to get major pieces of tort reform to the floor and over to the senate for consideration. Our court system needs to be fair to both plaintiffs and defendants. We must make Missouri a place where fear of needless litigation is not a disincentive to job creation.

But, no matter what we do in other areas, to ensure Missouri remains a state of opportunity, we must create an education system for the 21st century. We are going to embrace what is working and continue to invest in the thousands of educators across this state that are tasked with the incredible responsibility of teaching our youth. But we must also be mindful of the areas where we are falling short and we must be willing to embrace innovation. During this session, we will work to increase access to high performing charter schools. We will work to expand course offerings through virtual education. And we will work to make education savings accounts available to parents and students most in need. These changes should not be about administrators or school buildings, but only about creating opportunities for a generation of young Missourians who have been left behind.

I don't think the blueprint for economic success is that complicated: give kids access to a world class education and make sure there is a job available in a thriving private sector without government overreach.

I started today by talking about the state that we can be. Achieving that vision will require not only a transformation of our economy, but also continued work to make government more efficient and to protect the values that matter most to Missourians.

Missouri will continue to be a place that has a steadfast culture of life. Missouri will continue to be a place where fundamental constitutional rights are protected. Missouri will continue to be a place where we live within our means and hold the line on taxes.

Missourians also want a government they can trust and believe in. Last year we passed the first

meaningful ethics reform in modern Missouri history, and we must continue the job we started. I said at the end of last session the House will pass a ban on lobbyists providing gifts to elected officials and we will fulfill this commitment. A gift ban will be the first bill out of this House.

The work we do here will be difficult, and at times will seem impossible, but the work we do here matters to real people.

It matters to that middle-class family in Jefferson County that is concerned that the promise of economic opportunity is gone.

It matters to the mother in St. Louis who can't even begin to dream about her children's future because she's worried about whether they are going to get home safe from school.

It matters to that second grader in Poplar Bluff whose parents want nothing less for their children than the boundless opportunity of a dynamic, vibrant free market.

What we do matters, and this is our time to do our part to ensure that the promise of opportunity endures.

This is our time to restore that belief and faith that everyone has the opportunity to build a great life for themselves.

The time for half measures and solutions around the edges is over. This is the time for bold action.

Thank you and may God bless the great state of Missouri.